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The Errand

They were taking a ride. Barring hurricanes or blizzards,
they always took a ride after dinner.

It was interference! she insisted.

Well the guy hardly ever says boo. Last guy you'd expect
to confide in you. And then he hits me with that.

We're into that now in Psychology. Displacement it's
called or something. Dr. Halley mutters and you can't hear.

You got me. Ammonia I told you it was. He was a decisive
driver and gave other motorists sarcastic looks.

Don't get clever. You're not the one going to college

Thank God for both of us I'm not. Senior citizens boarding
a bus whipped by, their mouths full of twilight's initial glow.

He wants you for a friend and doesn't know how to ask. And
you're driving too fast! People are never saying what they're

saying. With this she wrenched the glowing rearview mirror to check her makeup, whereupon he gave her the look usually reserved for motorists.

Bullshit! What he asked about was about his wife. According to you, I say pass the cream it means I'm looking to grab some strange tit, right? Boy oh boy this night school of yours will be the death of me. Psychology sociology: it's all bullshit to about the nth power.

You tried to stop me from the first. She dove in her purse for gum; his hand, seemingly of orange grains, straightened the mirror in the descending light.

Hey! Get your PhD. What the hell do I care?

Well I've got to get my BA first.

No sweat. Anyways, he says "I just can't stand the smell. I mean anything else is impossible." I can hear him now. See all she does is clean...

I got that.

...and when they do get a chance to--well he can't 'cause o the ammonia stink all the time on her fingers. And you should see his lunchbox. She got the inside-white worn through to black with her scrubbing.

Let her get a degree. Her house'll go to shit too.

She abandoned her search for gum and snapped shut her purse, which made a whooshing sound, momentarily diverting his concentration from the busy road.

Now I aint saying it about you. I help don't I?

You mess it up more is what you do. Like you did to the case under discussion. When you heard him you should've shut up. It's their own personal business.

Oh cut it out! You're worse than my mother. What can happen?

That doesn't make any difference. It's their business. Everybody isn't a pervert like you. You be surprised! Why some women'd be pretty damned shocked by that suggestion of yours. You'd be surprised how many.

I sure would. Hey! I figured--he lifted a hand from the wheel to show two backlit fingers--kill two birds with one stone: get the ammonia stink off of her fingers AND THEN--

Take a shower together! You ass! That's a whole field today Sex Therapy. Just stay out of fields where you have no expertise.

You're the expert tease, Lady! Besides, I've taken showers so I know--tapping his head--something about it.

Hah hah! Next time just remember to stay out o these kinds of things. Knowing her, which I don't, if she does get

in there with him she'll use the opportunity to scrub him to a fare-thee-well. Squeaky clean. Squeaky clean means problems too.

Hey, people got problems before you took the psychology course you know, and some of them never even got to college and they found some way of solving things--you see that idiot Chinaman or whatever with his high beams? Look at my grandparents.

Now she glared at him, the horizon an orange-purple bar behind his profile. Drunks, she informed, fuzzed up on vodka martinis!

The solution which he didn't understand at the time or since was to take a box of Fanny Farmer Chocolates to the other couple's house, leaving her in the car to possibly be invited in.

They parked in the back of the busy shopping center and he went in over the gummy tiles of the employee tunnels while she looked up the address in the torn directory at the outside phone.

What the hell for? These candies, as he wheeled out of the shopping center. I still don't know. You must be curious. To see her I mean.

Uh uh. Let her clean her house. When I get my degree I'll

have time to clean mine. Don't you need lights?

Uh uh, not quite. Parking lights yes, just right. Hey I got it! You want to see inside their house!

If it works out. Maybe I'll get a chance to tell her what men are really like.

Tell me. I been married to you so long it's all batted the hell out of me.

The house proves to be a clone of all the other bungalows on the curving drive, but the short privet under the front widows looks more solid than those of the near neighbors and is much more surgically trimmed. Above it, the picture window resembles a species of dark, translucent marble in the afterglow, and two piece of golden lint still adhere as if static electricity could defeat even the most meticulous among us.

After rocking up the walk of scoured-out tiles, he knocks, and calls then, and eventually tries the door since he has heard water running against a thick silence; now dark little rivulets flow at him through the deep, creamy rug. His hands play up and down the slippery wall looking or a light switch even as his feet sink into the rug. Eventually he just runs towards a crack of light and its sound of running water.

Back in the car she stirs, wondering why he left the door to

the house open. At that moment it slams shut, the draft huffing away the lint on the black window.

And in the shivering, brilliant bathroom he sees her first: against the side of the shower stall, her face blue and her breasts seemingly collapsed, with blood still coiling thinly from each finger of her rigid, down-fanned hands and joining the swirling water. The raw lumps blocking the drain, once his coworker, look like an immense red-white sponge, or a waste bundle put aside by the butcher.

Outside, seconds later, a glimmer tugs her eye to the picture window. It is the Fanny Farmer box followed by a drizzle of black-looking chocolates. In their wake the pale white streak of her husband's trailing eye as his face smears vapor.

WHAT THE SHIT! she flings open the car door.